Returning to Our True Home

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

Good morning dear friends.
Welcome to the summer opening of Plum Village. Today we are on the 16th of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

This is the Dharma talk for the very young people. We want to talk to you about pebble meditation. You know what a pebble is: a small piece of rock. This morning each young person should go and look for five pebbles. It may be a little bit difficult but you have to go around the campus in the Upper Hamlet or in the Lower Hamlet or in the New Hamlet and you look for five beautiful pebbles because we are going to practice pebble meditation in the next seven days. Those of you who feel young you can do that also.

After having found the five most beautiful pebbles, you have to go and wash them very carefully, with soap, and dry them, and you do that with love and care because the pebbles are going to help you to be more peaceful, more happy. If your mommy is there, or your big sister is there, have her make you a little bag in order to carry the five pebbles. A little bag like this. And every time you practice sitting meditation you have to bring the five pebbles along. Don't forget it. If you forget the pebbles, it is like a musician forgetting his or her guitar.

When you come to the meditation hall, you practice walking slowly in to the place where you will sit down. The moment when you enter the door of the meditation hall, you know that this is the meditation hall, a quiet place. A place of peace, a place of strength. And therefore you respect the silence. Very important. If you respect the silence of the meditation hall, then everyone will profit from the meditation hall. If you make a lot of noise in the meditation hall, that will not be kind to other people who do need the meditation for their practice.

When you enter the door of the meditation hall, bow to the Buddha. The Buddha may not be there on the altar, but he is somewhere in the garden. Even if you don't see a Buddha, bow to a flower because, believe it or not, the flower is a Buddha. Sometimes I bow to the moon, and I call the moon a Buddha. Moon-Buddha, flower-Buddha. Sometimes I bow to a tree-Buddha. And sometimes I bow to a child. I bow to a child with my respect, because I know that the child is also a Buddha. If the child practices to become very calm, very gentle, she is very close to being a Buddha. So, every time I bow to a child, I don't do it just for the sake of being polite. I do it as a practice, because I know that if a child is calm, and peaceful, and happy, he or she is very close to being a Buddha. And if she keeps practicing, she will become a fully enlightened Buddha. I do have great respect for all children. I do have great respect for adults too, because all adults have been children in the past.

After you bow to the Buddha, in the direction of the Buddha garden, you practice walking slowly, mindfully, to the cushion where you will sit. You make several steps. Breathe in, one step. Breathe out, one step. You walk like a Buddha. The Buddha walks very mindfully, very beautifully, and if you think that you are a student of the Buddha, you have to practice, you have to walk deeply. And when you arrive at your cushion, bow to the cushion, because the cushion is going to help you to sit peacefully. The cushion is a friend. You bow to the cushion, say “Thank you, cushion,” and sit down. Remember: one step, one breath. Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step, and I say, “In, out. In, out” until I arrive and I sit down.

And when I have sat down, I want to check whether my sitting position is correct or not because a correct sitting meditation is something like this. You are straight, you sit upright. Try to do it now: sit upright, in an upright position like this. But not stiff. Not like a piece of wood, no. The Buddha is not that stiff. The Buddha is very relaxed. Upright position. You may like to sit in the lotus position. The lotus position is one foot over the other. There. That is lotus position. Beautiful. Many of you can do it. Learn how to do it. Later on I would like you to draw a picture of yourself, sitting in the lotus position, smiling.

After you are sure that you are sitting in the most beautiful position, then you take out your little bag of the five pebbles. It is very important to do it slowly, mindfully. You take each pebble one by one, and you put it on your lap, just in front of your left knee. One, two, three, four, five. And you put the little empty bag next to them. After everybody has put his or her five pebbles out, you will hear the sound of the bell. The sound of the bell is the voice of the Buddha calling you, supporting you. The Buddha says something like, “Dear one, I am there for you. I am there with you. I am there to support you.” So you have to listen to the bell like that.

Every time during the day when you hear the bell, always practice like that. Listen to the bell like you listen to the most beloved person, the Buddha, because the Buddha is love, the Buddha is care, the Buddha is in your mother, is in your father, is in yourself. The Buddha is always calling you to go back to yourself, to be more gentle, to be more peaceful, to be more happy. So when you listen to the bell, the Buddha of the bell, the sound of the bell, never talk. Never think. Never do anything, because you are listening to the voice of a person you respect and you love a lot. Just stand there quietly and listen with all your heart. If there are three sounds, then you listen for the whole period of three sounds, and during that time you listen and you breathe deeply. But I would recommend that you don't do it automatically. You breathe in and you feel fine, you breathe out and you feel happy, that is very important. What is the use of breathing, of practicing, if you don't feel fine, if you don't feel happy?

After you hear the sound of the bell, you begin to practice pebble meditation. Here is the practice for the children, but I guess the adults can imitate. It's very beautiful practice. I love this practice. I breathe in, and I call the name of the person I love the most. If your mother is the person you love the most, when you breathe in, you breathe deeply and call “Mommy!” Call her name in such a way that she becomes totally present, even if she is not there with you, even if she is in the kitchen, or in another city, or another town, or even if she is no longer there alive. She is with you in that moment. Call her name, deeply, with all your heart, and breathe in, and she is there with you, right away, very real, very deep. And when you breathe out, you say, “Here I am.”

So during that practice of breathing in and breathing out, you and your mother are fully present. This is a very deep practice. It is not only for children. I practice it every day. I enjoy it very much, and I have more than five people I love the most. I am free to choose -- this evening I will choose five people, and next morning I will choose another five people. That can bring you a lot of happiness. Suppose you hold the name of someone who is very real, very fresh, very loving, very kind, and if you call his name, or her name, deeply, that person will be with you right in the moment and you can see that your body and your mind are refreshed by the presence of that person. So before the sitting meditation, you have to jot down the name of five persons whose name you think you are going to call. The Buddha is calling.

[Bell]

I just practiced “Dear Buddha,” breathing in, “Here I am,” breathing out. Very wonderful.

So if your mother is one of the persons you love the most, then you might begin by calling her name "Mother!" And when you breathe out, you smile and you say, "Here I am." It is a very deep practice. Because meditation is to be there, to be present, and this we learn always. No matter how long you have practiced Buddhist meditation, you have to learn it again and again. To meditate means to be there. To be there with one hundred percent of yourself. If you are there only eighty percent, that's good, but that's not perfect. I don't blame you for not being perfect. I just ask you to do better and better all the time. Maybe yesterday I was able to be there eighty percent, today I try to be eighty-one percent; because the more I am present, the happier I become, the more solid I become. This is only for my happiness, my stability; not for someone else's.

You call the name of your mother five times, breathing in, and you say five times, breathing out, "Here I am." And after you finished five breathing in, breathing out, calling the name of your mother, and then you use your two fingers, you pick up one pebble, and you move it to your right. You understand? Not complicated. And then you sit upright again, and you begin to breathe in again, and call the name of the second person. Suppose you love David. David is very sweet to you. David is a person who tends to be wonderful, compassionate, helpful. So you breathe in and you call "David!" and you breathe out and you say, "Here I am." Here is the length of my in-breath. I breathe like this: [Ten second pause]. And during that whole time, I just call his name, or her name. So you have enough time in order to make him or her fully present.

And when she is fully present, you just break out and smile, and you say, "Here I am." It is very wonderful. I think even during the first hour of practice, the first time you practice, you find joy and happiness already. I believe it. So you call his name five times, and you say "Here I am." five times, breathing in and out, and enjoy doing that. I prefer you not do it, rather than do it and not enjoy doing it and think that it is something you have to do like a mathematics exercise. No, I don't want you to do meditation like doing a mathematics exercise. This is much more pleasant. Very nourishing, very wonderful. And I want to do it right! Otherwise later on you say "Thây did not teach me right." I want to give you the right teaching, the teaching that can help you to be happy and peaceful.

And after you finish "David" five times, you move the second pebble to your right, until you finish all five pebbles. And if you still have time, if the bell doesn't ring yet, and then you continue the practice and you move the pebble from the right back to the left. And during the time of doing so, if the bell sounds, and there are still two or three pebbles to be practiced, it's OK, because we practice all our life. For children I don't want the practice to take too long a time. Just right for the young people. If they sit too long, they will get tired easily. So I don't want them to sit too long. I don't want adults to sit too long, too, if they suffer during sitting. It is better not to sit than to suffer while sitting. Please.

And when you hear the bell, just practice breathing in and out again. "Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I smile." You have succeeded in your pebble meditation today and you are going to put it down in your notebook, that today I have practiced pebble meditation well, I succeeded. I had some joy, some compassion, and some happiness during the practice of pebble meditation. And after three sounds of the bell, practicing breathing in and breathing out, you hear a very small sound of the bell. This sound:

[Bell]

That sound is for you to bow, and to undo your legs and to massage them with gentleness. You practice massage, you try to be nice, to be kind to your legs. You help the blood to

circulate well in your leg. You have the time to do so. If you are the leader of the pebble meditation, please remember allow enough time for the other children to massage their feet. That is the practice of compassion. Remember, because during pebble meditation I want the leader to be a young person. So you select, you elect your own leader every time, to lead the pebble meditation. And you know if you are a leader of pebble meditation, you got to have a watch. I don't have any watch today.

So you have enough time to massage your feet, and after you have massaged your feet, you still have time, to do what? To put the five pebbles back into the bag, the small bag, and put it into your pocket. Later on you may practice walking meditation, slow walking meditation, but walking meditation is the subject of another Dharma talk. Today is just pebble meditation. So, dear young people, you know what you have to do today. Go and look for five beautiful pebbles. Wash them carefully and try to make a little bag for it. If you don't have a bag today, you can wait for tomorrow, after tomorrow. You may put it in a small envelope, a paper envelope. But I want you to have a very beautiful little bag in order to contain your five pebbles. So have a very pleasant day, happy day. When you hear the small bell, you stand up and bow and then when you hear another bell you turn around and bow to the Sangha, and you practice going out slowly, mindfully, beautifully, in the style of walking meditation. Have a good day.

[Bell]

My dear friends: meditation is the act of stopping and looking. We have to learn the art of stopping and the art of looking. And the practice may be pleasant, must be pleasant. It is possible to make the practice pleasant, nourishing. It is not hard labor. People speak of meditation in terms of *samatha* and *vipassana*. Samatha means stopping and vipassana means looking, looking deeply. If you stop, you stop well. And if you look, you look well. Stopping is an art. Stopping in order to give your body and your mind a chance to heal. Because our mind has the capacity of healing itself. Our body also, if we allow it, will be able to heal itself. But because we don't know how to stop, how to give our body a chance, our body cannot heal itself. Our mind also is a kind of body, a spiritual body. Our mind does have the capacity of healing itself. But if it does not heal itself, if it has not healed itself because we have not given it a chance — that is why you have to learn the deep art of stopping, samatha. Samatha is stopping. To stop in order for calm, concentration, tranquility, to become possible.

Imagine a river reflecting the full moon. The river must be calm in order to reflect the full moon. If the river or the ocean is full of waves, if it is too turbulent, then it can never reflect the beautiful image of the moon. Our body, if it is not calm, if it is not restful, then it will not be able to restore itself, to heal itself. You know that when an animal gets wounded because of a hunter, or because of some other accident, that animal in the jungle will find a calm place to lie down. That is the practice of all animals in the forest. And the animal will lie down there very quietly, not eating anything, until the wound is healed; because the animal knows that if it continues to look for something to eat, then its body will have no chance to rest and restore itself. So looking at the animal, we see already the wisdom of stopping and resting and calming. The animals can do it, why can't we do it ourselves.

Do we need to eat all the time, every day? I just finished a fourteen days fast, and I look fine. I even look better. You may think that I am a little bit thin, but I feel fine. By fasting, by not doing anything, by abandoning all projects, all desires, you allow your body to stop, to rest, to renew itself. And that is why during the time you are with us in Plum Village, try your best to learn the art of stopping, of resting. Now a season of labor comes. People are very eager to go to the beach and to other holiday resorts, and they think that they are going to rest, but I am not sure that they are going to rest. They may get very tired after the period of so-called

resting. Here in Plum Village, you have a Sangha. You have a community of many hundred people, and all of them are trying to really rest, really stop, and you try to do like them. You allow yourself a chance. If you can allow your body to rest, then you can also allow your mind, your consciousness, to rest also. All of us need it.

The animal knows that there is a reserve in itself. It can survive many, many days without eating, and that is why the animal is not eager to go and look for something to eat. In fact, fasting is a very wonderful way of healing yourself. The most difficult disease you have may just be healed by fasting. You don't even need a doctor. You are the doctor. You know your needs. You know how do lie down. You know how to lie down? Are you sure? You know how to sit quietly? Are you sure? Do you have the opportunity to lie down and really rest? Do you have the opportunity to really sit down, properly? Because in you there is a tendency to struggle, to do this, to do that, because you have been taught since time immemorial that you have to struggle for your happiness. And during many generations you have been struggling, you have been running. You have never been able to stop. Our great-grandfather did like that, our grandfather did like that, our father did like that, and now we are doing exactly the same thing. Always running, because we believe that happiness is something in the future, and you have to go there in order to grasp it.

So it is not that easy to stop and to rest. You have to learn, and you have to get the support of brothers and sisters who are doing the same. They don't urge you to do. They help you by doing that by themselves. When everyone is practicing walking (walking means stopping, walking meditation), sitting, enjoying a silent meal, because all these practices are just for the sake of stopping. Are you able to enjoy a meal without running, running inside? During the time of a meal, you may run into ten directions. You are not really there for your meal, and for your Sangha. And that is why you have to receive instructions properly, and you have to do it properly in order for our rest, our stopping, to be possible. You know how important it is to rest, to stop. That the animal is healed is not a miracle, because the animal knows the way how to heal itself.

Just yesterday, someone asked Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, what he'd like the most, what he needs the most. He said, "What I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have never had the chance to sit down." Poor man. Do you want to be the president of the republic? He said that he has not had a chance to sit down for himself, and to sit down with his children. What kind of life is that? When I heard the report, I asked myself whether, if he were given time to sit down, would he be able to sit down? I don't know whether he has learned the art of sitting or not, but if you don't know how to sit, then even if you are offered the time to sit, to do nothing, you will not be able to do so. You will stand up right away, and you continue to run. You are more fortunate than Nelson Mandela. You can afford to come to a retreat just to sit down, just to lie down and do nothing. But again, you have a chance. That does not mean that you can do it. Therefore, we have to learn from each other, and the Buddha has offered us so many ways in order for us to heal our self, including stopping. Breathing is stopping. Walking is stopping. Sitting is stopping. Eating is stopping. Meditation is to stop.

We have to believe in our capacity of healing, the capacity of our body to heal itself. You know when you cut your finger, you don't worry, because you know that it will heal by itself, provided that you don't interfere too much. You just wash it and leave it like that. Maybe in a few hours or one night it will be able to do so. So your body has the power of healing itself. You know it. For the more serious illness, it can also heal itself, provided that you give it a chance, you allow it to do so. So learn the technique of total relaxation, learn the technique of lying down there not doing anything, especially in your head, because many of us, while laying down or sitting, still run in our heads, still run in our minds. Because that is a habit of

one thousand, three thousand years already. We have inherited it from our ancestors and the society urges us to continue and to double that kind of speed.

The Buddha said that what you are looking for may be already there, in the here and the now. But you are running, and if you are running, how can you recognize what you are looking for. It is right there in the here and the now. Peace is available in the here and the now, believe it or not. Calm is also available in the here and the now. The Buddha is not in India. The Buddha is there in the here and the now. You can touch him at any time you want. The kingdom of God is also there in the here and the now. The present moment is the only moment where you can touch these wonderful things that you are looking for. But you always run, you abandon the present moment because you believe that what you are looking for is somewhere there in the future. So stopping means trying to dwell in the present moment, trying to go back to the present moment, because the present moment contains everything you are looking for, including your immediate need, resting. How can you rest in the future? How can you rest in the past? The present moment is the only moment when you can rest. So make good use of it.

Now let us ask the question whether you can dwell peacefully and restfully in five minutes, because our body needs it badly, our soul needs it very badly, and you know it. So please learn. All of us have learned about deep relaxation. In the lying position, you allow your muscles to be relaxed. You practice love directed to your body. You think you love yourself, but that's not evident. To love oneself means also to take good care of your body. That is one of the basic things. But do you allow your body to rest? Are you always assigning it to do something, always? You have never allowed your body to really rest, even during the time of sleeping, your body is assigned to do something, consciously or unconsciously. And even during the time of sleep, your body does not rest. In the lying position, allow yourself to be in the here and the now. All your projects, all your worries, must be postponed. Why do you have to worry when your body needs a rest? If you continue to worry, how could your body rest? So you have to support your body by not worrying.

When you practice breathing in or breathing out, you have to put one hundred percent of your mind into the in-breath and out-breath, and if you can do so, you stop the worry. You stop your projects. You invest in the in-breath and out-breath. I breathe in, I just enjoy breathing in. Breathing in for this moment is the most important thing I want to do, and I enjoy breathing in. Breathing in, I feel wonderful; breathing out, I smile. One in-breath, one out-breath, can help you do that, and help your body to be off pressure, because your body has always been under pressure, not only from society, from what you call deadlines, but from your mind. You don't have a habit of granting your body a real rest because you are used to worrying too much, to making too many projects. You think that your happiness, your safety, depends on these projects; and if you don't worry, who will worry for you? But you have been worried for many thousand years. So enjoy breathing in, because breathing in is a wonderful thing to do.

The Buddha left behind a very wonderful text called the *Anapanasati Sutra*, the Sutra on Mindful Breathing, and he presented to us a number of exercises that help us to practice deep relaxing and deep looking. There is one exercise you might like to practice: “Breathing in, I calm my body.” “I calm my body,” that means I let my body have a chance to do nothing, to calm down. “Breathing out, I smile to my body.” Have you been kind to your body? Have you smiled to your body?

That exercise, “Breathing in, I calm my body; breathing out, I smile to my body,” might be practiced when you sit, or when you lie down. Invest one hundred percent of yourself into the practice, because if you do well, then all thinking, all projects, all worries will be stopped.

You are at one with your in-breath, your out-breath, and you allow your body to rest. So, in a sitting meditation, in a sitting position, you allow your body to rest. On your cushions, you don't fight, even for enlightenment. You don't fight to become a Buddha. If you allow yourself to be, that's already wonderful. If you can afford to have half an hour of sitting, you know that you are luckier than Nelson Mandela. So please use your half hour of sitting wisely. Make a plan: tonight I will have a chance to sit for half an hour, so I know what I will do during that time. I will ask a Dharma brother, a Dharma sister, or a Dharma teacher, how I can succeed during that half an hour of sitting meditation. I have to succeed. You know I very much wish that the children succeed in their pebble meditation. We also have to succeed in our sitting meditation. Please don't do it for the sake of the form. We don't have that kind of luxury. Our body needs us. Our mind needs us. Therefore we have to love them, to take care of them, to allow them a chance to rest, to restore themselves.

Maybe during the first or second exercise of breathing, you feel already wonderful, because just to sit there and to breathe is already wonderful. Many people cannot afford to do that. Even if they want to do that, nobody tells them how to do it. Now we are in a Sangha. Everyone in the Sangha is able to help us: how to breathe in and breathe out, and to be relaxed, to be calm. And we have to cherish the chance of practice. And during the breathing in and out, you might feel wonderful. You might feel rested. And then the Buddha will advise you to proceed to the next exercise: “Breathing in, I feel joyful. I feel wonderful. Breathing out, I smile to my joy.” This is nourishing, very nourishing. Believe it or not, you are there, alive. That is a miracle. That is the greatest of all miracles, and you have to celebrate it.

We have destroyed so many moments of our lives. We have destroyed so many days, so many months, so many years of our lives. We spent them in suffering, in anguish, in anger, and that is a waste. We have to cherish all moments that are left for us to live. We have to live peacefully, happily, and that is our greatest gift for the world, for the next generation. Our children need our happiness. They don't need our money. They need our happiness, because if we know how to live happily with each other, the children will learn it from us, and that is the greatest heritage we can hand down to our children. Many young people have told me that the greatest gift that parents can give to their children is their own happiness. You have to listen to them. They need it badly.

So during the time you practice breathing in, breathing out, you invest one hundred percent of your energy, of yourself, into the in-breath and the out-breath. That is for your body. That is for your mind. In the sitting position or in the lying down position, when you feel a little bit of joy, of confidence in your practice, then you practice, “Breathing in, I feel joyful. Breathing out, I smile to my happiness, to my joy.” Continue like that, on the cushion. Please do not say that this is something difficult to do. It's simple. You can do it. And you have Dharma brothers and sisters around you to support you. If you want to support your brother or your sister, practice well. Practice so that stability and peace become something real, in the present moment.

The Buddha said that life is available only in the present moment, and if you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. And that is why: go back to the present moment where you can be alive, where you can live deeply each moment of your life, and where you can allow your body and your soul to live. You do it for yourself, but you do it for all of us. We need you to be peaceful. We need you to be stable. We need you to have joy. That is for the sake of the world. Your practice is not an individual matter. Your practice will benefit the whole world. When you are able to breathe in and breathe out with joy and peace, the whole world profits. Not only will the people who are close to you profit, the whole world will profit.

[Bell]

I enjoy so much breathing in and breathing out. It's so easy. It's so pleasant. And I wish all of you could do the same. The bell reminds us. Every time you hear the bell, please practice going back to the present moment, breathing in, breathing out. Take good care of yourself. Feel alive. Feel that life is a wonder. Don't waste your life. Don't ruin your life, because your life is our life, also. There is a very simple gatha, a simple verse for you to practice. You might like to learn it today. When you breathe in, you say, “I have arrived,” and when you breathe out, you say, “I am home.” According to this practice, your true home is in the here and the now, and our practice is the practice of arriving every second into our true home, which is the present moment, the only moment when life is available. We have been running all our lives to the past, to the future, to our projects. Now it is time to go home. And if you go home and look and touch deeply, you'll be surprised to see that what you are looking for is already there. Peace is available. Touch it, live it, enjoy. And when you do it, peace will reveal itself more and more clearly.

"I have arrived. I am home.” It means that I don't have to run anymore. When you hear the bell, you say “Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.” My true home is here and now. The here and the now is universal. “Here” is not Plum Village; “here” is everywhere you are, and “now” is something that goes along with the here, because the here and the now cannot be divided. They are just one thing, and that is your true home. If you think that the Kingdom of God is your true home, then the Kingdom of God is in the here and the now. You don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, you have to be very alive in order to do so. To be fully alive, to go back to the present moment, and to be there with one hundred percent of yourself, means to be alive. “I have arrived, I am home.” On your cushion, practice arriving. You arrive in every second, every minute, to be there, alive.

During walking meditation, you also practice arriving. If you practice slow walking in the hall, you take one step, you take one in-breath and you say “I have arrived.” How wonderful! It's easy, simple, it's very pleasant to practice. Your left foot touches the floor, the wooden floor. It's wonderful. Do you know that the wood is made of cloud and sunshine? The wood is made of cloud and sunshine and wind and earth, and for your feet to touch the wood, it's a very wonderful thing. If you are really there, you feel it, but if you are elsewhere, you don't feel it. Wood is nothing, your foot is nothing, you are nothing, because you are not there, in the here and the now. You breathe in and you say, “I have arrived.” You cut through all thinking, all projects, all worries, you go back and establish yourself firmly in the present moment.

One step only, one breath only, and already you can realize a miracle, the miracle of being fully alive. Don't tell me that you cannot do that. You know that you can do that. Just breathe in, and make it one step, and become fully alive by bringing yourself entirely back to the present moment. And when you breathe out, you are already a wonder, because to be alive and to be walking on the earth is a miracle. Remember, you have seen a dead body. You cannot make that dead body rise and practice walking meditation anymore. But you are not a dead body. You are alive, and your feet are strong enough to enjoy walking meditation.

Plum Village is made for you to practice walking. Many thousand people have been walking around here, mindfully, and enjoying every second. The site has become a holy site, because mindfulness has been printed again and again on this soil. This soil during World War II was a place where tragedy took place, but because of our practice, we have transformed the atmosphere, we have transformed the land's soil. It is now a very peaceful, very holy place. Thanks to you all who have come to Plum Village and practiced with us. You practice

walking meditation all year round, and we print our peace, our joy, on this soil, on this very soil. And when you practice walking around here you feel energy of practice.

When you say “I have arrived,” breathing in, and when you say, “I am home,” breathing out, you feel that you don't need to do anything else. Why do you have to pursue that project? Why do you think that if you don't realize the project, happiness is not possible? So you are able to realize stopping. Happiness is simple: I can have it right here and right now, and conditions for my happiness seem to be more than enough. I am still alive. My feet are still strong, my eyes are still in good condition, I can see the blue sky. I can see all kinds of forms and colors. My ears are also still in good condition. I can listen to all kinds of sounds, including the sounds of the birds. And my heart is functioning normally. You see, there are so many conditions for your happiness that are available, but because we are looking for another condition, that is why we deny all these conditions that are already existing. That is a loss. That is a pity.

Awakening -- Buddhism is the teaching of awakening. You have to wake up in order to realize that everything you are looking for is already there, may already be there. You have to recognize it. And walking meditation is also to stop. Even if you are still walking, you have already stopped. And if you make three hundred steps, make sure that each step brings you back peace, stability, and joy. Don't just walk like that, letting your mind wander around, going into the ten directions. Bring your mind back and tie it to your feet. Enjoy every step you make. Do it for all of us. If you can smile a smile of happiness, that will be very nourishing for your body, for your mind, for your Sangha, for the whole world. We need your smile badly.

"I have arrived, I am home.” You practice like that for a few minutes. One breath, one step, in the meditation hall. And after some time you switch into the second exercise: “In the here and in the now,” “In the here and in the now.” It is exactly the same kind of practice. You have brought back yourself to the present moment. Maybe you have brought eighty percent of yourself back to the present moment. There is still twenty percent more to do. So when you say, “In the here and in the now,” you may be able to be completely mindful and present. So each in-breath is to bring you back to the here; each out-breath is supposed to bring you back to the now, in the here and the now, because the here and the now is wonderful. Don't just say the word. It is silly just to say the word. The word is a means to help with your concentration, to show you what you are really doing, making peaceful, mindful, happy thoughts.

"I have arrived, I am home, in the here and in the now.” And a few minutes of practice will bring you more stability and freedom. Freedom from what? This is not political freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from suffering. You get it slowly, just by dwelling in the present moment, and touching the wonders of life. You will get rid of the kind of worries that are not essential at all, because peace and joy are possible. Why do you have to worry too much? “I am solid,” because you have become solid. This is not autosuggestion, because after few minutes of practicing arriving in the here and the now, you feel that you are more solid, and you feel that you are more free. Free from what? Free from these worries, free from these anxieties, from these projects.

Please note that solidity and freedom are the two characteristics, the two basic characteristics, of *nirvana*. Nirvana is a state of being where solidity and freedom exist, and you can touch nirvana right in the first hour of practice. And if you continue the touching you'll be deeper and deeper all the time, until you can touch nirvana one hundred percent. The Buddha said that in the here and the now, you can touch nirvana with your own body. He did not say with your mind. Touching nirvana with your own body, that is the way the Buddha put it. It is possible. It is not an idea. It is not a notion. It is something you already can do. And happiness

will be something possible if stability and freedom are there. To practice means to cultivate solidity and freedom, which are essential to our well-being, essential to our happiness.

"I have arrived, I am home," and then, "In the here, in the now." Then, "I am solid, I am free." And finally, "In the ultimate I dwell." Or, if you want, "In the Buddha-land I dwell," or "In the Kingdom of God I dwell," because nirvana, the Buddha-land, the Kingdom of God, is available in the here and the now, and you have begun to touch it. The depth of your touching depends on your concentration, on your mindfulness, on your stability. André Gide said that God is available to you twenty-four hours a day. André Gide is a French author, and he's right. Nirvana also, the Buddha, the Buddha-land also, is available to you twenty-four hours a day if you care, if you really care. If you go back to the present moment and make yourself available, and then the other thing is also available. The other thing is the full moon, the cherry blossoms, the blue sky, the smile of your beloved one, life, nirvana.

Please don't be satisfied with words and notions. You have to get the real thing. The real thing is stability, solidity, and freedom. "I am solid, I am free. In the Buddha-land I dwell." And walking like that can make you very happy. You are there, but you are already in the real thing, in the ultimate. The ultimate means the world of no birth, no death. Nirvana is the world of no birth and no death. If you dwell in the present moment and if you practice looking deeply, one time, one day, you will touch very deeply the ground of your being, the ground of your being where birth and death vanish. It's like a wave. If the wave practices touching itself deeply, it will touch the water inside itself. A wave might be born or might be dying, but the water is not subjected to birth and death. Your true nature is the nature of no birth and no death, the nature of nirvana. So if you walk deeply, you begin to touch your own nature. That is why we say "In the ultimate I dwell." It's very deep.

And if you practice walking meditation outside, you can do it more quickly. Instead of one step, one breath, you make two steps, or even three steps, one breath. Instead of simply doing "I have arrived, I am home," you do like this: "I have arrived, arrived, I am home, home." So breathing in, I make two steps, two beautiful steps, and when I breathe out, I make two beautiful steps, and I enjoy it just the same. When you go back to your city and practice walking meditation in Central Park, you wouldn't like to go too slowly, like in the meditation hall. People will look at you and wonder what you are doing, you don't look very normal. You want to be normal, you want to be natural. So you can be very mindful, very concentrated, and yet you can look absolutely natural. You can make three steps while breathing in: "I have arrived, arrived, arrived." You don't have to close your eyes. In fact you have to open your eyes in order to enjoy the trees, the birds, the blue sky, and the people around you. And yet you are concentrated, because you are following your in-breath and out-breath.

"I have arrived, arrived, arrived. I am home, I am home, I am home." You'll be surprised to see that you have no desires left. That's wonderful. True happiness is only available if you have no desire. No desire is the object of my deepest desire. Why should I desire anything else? If I found it is wonderful in the here and the now and I have everything, why should I desire something else? Not a difficult thing. So, please practice and discover that the miracles, the jewels, the most precious things you are looking for are already available: the fact that you are alive, and many wonders of life within you and around you. So during the time you practice walking with the Sangha outside, you can make three steps or two steps, but I would advise you to use the same kind of speed that the Sangha is using, so that you become part of the harmony, of the symphony. And to walk like that is just to enjoy life. To be walking mindfully and enjoy every step you make is to celebrate life. You don't have an orchestra with you. You don't have drums or trumpets and other things in order to celebrate. You just touch the earth and walk with the other brothers and sisters, and you are celebrating the fact that you are alive, and you do it very deeply because you are dwelling in the here and the now. And

during the time of walking, your body rests. Your mind rests, also. Not only during the time of sitting or lying down.

About eating: eating is also resting. Eating is a very deep practice. You sit there with the community and you offer one hundred percent of yourself, not less. Don't sit somewhere else. Please sit with us one hundred percent. And you know in order to do that, in order to offer us your true presence, you have to practice mindful breathing. Mindful breathing will bring you back to the here and the now. We need you to be with us. And during the whole time of the meal, we touch only two things, our mind touches only two things: the food, which is the gift of the sky and the earth, and also the community of practice that is there. My mind does not think or embrace anything else, because to be alive, to be sitting there and enjoying a meal with brothers and sisters in the practice, is a wonderful thing.

This is something practiced by the Buddha and his monks and nuns during that time. It is called "one sitting lunch." You sit down very beautifully and you enjoy the meal until the end; meanwhile, you don't think. And you have to enjoy every moment of the meal. Sit upright, look at the food, smile to it. Each morsel of food is an ambassador from the cosmos. It contains sunshine, clouds, the sky, the earth, the farmer, everything. Each morsel of the food is a piece of bread offered to you by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper. You have to eat it mindfully, in mindfulness. Look into the piece of bread, look into the piece of carrot you are eating, one hundred percent of yourself, and touch that, deeply. When you pick up one piece of carrot, don't put it into your mouth yet. Look at it and smile to it. And if you are mindful, you will see deeply into the piece of carrot. Sunshine is inside. A cloud is inside. The great earth is inside. A lot of love, a lot of hard work is inside. And when you have seen clearly the real piece of carrot, you put it into your mouth, and you chew it mindfully. And please, be sure to chew only carrots, and not your projects, not your worries.

This is deep practice: enjoy chewing your carrot. It is wonderful. The piece of carrot is a miracle. You, also, are a miracle. And chew carefully. In Plum Village, we chew from thirty times to fifty times, because we love it. We don't have to do it, but because the time being together is wonderful. So you just spend time with your food, and every minute of your lunch should be happy. And from time to time, you would pause and look and smile at a sister or a brother in the Dharma. Not many people, including Nelson Mandela, have the time, have the chance, have the opportunity to sit down and enjoy a meal like that. We are very fortunate.

We are very glad that you have come and shared the summer opening with us. Today we have a formal meal, like in the tradition. It's a little bit longer than in other days, but we have to keep the tradition alive, so each week, we have just one formal meal, and during the time of the meal, we offer a little bit of food, symbolically, to living beings before we eat. Now it is time for walking meditation, to celebrate the fact that we are all still alive, then after that we will take a break before participating in the weekly formal meal.

Now you have learned how to walk. Please, from this time on, every time you need to walk, only use the style of walking meditation. We don't use any other kind of walking style here, just walking like you are, the happiest person ever.